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SUBJECT: KOSOVO WEEKLY: GOS COMPLAINS ABOUT U.S. THREAT; ADVISES
KOSOVO SERBS NOT TO VOTE

REF: BELGRADE 1252

Summary

1. (SBU) Serbian Prime Minister Vojislav Kostunica and his Democratic Party of Serbia (DSS) protested throughout the week, through the media and to the UNSC, the perceived USG "threat" to Serbia's territorial integrity. Kostunica traveled to Brussels, in an attempt to organize EU opposition to any possible unilateral declaration of independence (UDI) by Pristina. The DSS backed off slightly from previous comments about the use of military force in case of a UDI. The Russian DCM reiterated to DCM the Russian government position that Kosovo negotiations should continue, if the sides failed to reach agreement by December. Serbia's government and president jointly advised Kosovo Serbs not to participate in the upcoming assembly elections in Kosovo. Democratic Party (DS) leadership reverted to its previous silence, and muted endorsement of the DSS-led positions on Kosovo issues. End Summary.

Kostunica Declares United States "Threatens" Serbia

2. (U) PM Kostunica characterized EUR Deputy Assistant Secretary Volker's comments to Agence France Press regarding possible recognition of Kosovo independence as a "U.S. threat," to Serbia's sovereignty. In local media reports, Kostunica stated on September 8, "using the policy of force, the United States threatens openly that it will not respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Serbia, which is an internationally recognized state and a UN member. In that way, the U.S. actually says that it will violate the UN Charter and Resolution 1244 in the harshest way." Following up on his public statements that he would call upon the UN to protect Serbia from the United States, Kostunica instructed Serbia's UN Ambassador Jevremovic to inform UNSC members of the U.S. comments.

Ambassador Munter Interview

3. (SBU) The Ambassador, in widely-reported interview for the Beta Wire Service on September 13, restated the USG commitment to the ongoing Troika-facilitated negotiations, U.S. hope for a solution agreeable to both parties to the talks, and U.S. support for supervised independence of Kosovo, in accordance with the Ahtisaari Plan, as the best solution for Kosovo, should the current discussions not produce an alternative.

4. (U) The B92 radio station/internet service reported on September 12 that Dusan Lazic, a member of the MFA's new Advisory Council on Foreign Affairs, said that Serbia should accept the U.S. Embassy's answer and focus on negotiations. Lazic said that Serbia should drop the issue and focus on the remaining Kosovo status talks. "Even though the explanation does not seem to be sufficient, it would be better for our side not to add more tension to the situation," Lazic said.

Government Efforts to De-link Kosovo from EU Membership

¶5. (U) Local media reported that Kostunica told the European Commission Chairman Jose Manuel Barroso in a September 12 meeting in Brussels that "there can be no trading with Kosovo" in the process of Serbia's entry into the EU. He warned his EU interlocutors that the threat of a unilateral declaration of Kosovo's independence would be a threat to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Serbia, and would violate the U.N. Charter and Helsinki Act.

¶6. (U) Former Foreign Minister Goran Svilanovic, also on the MFA's Advisory Council, said on September 12, "Serbia's entry into the EU cannot be conditioned on solving Kosovo's status, because the only common stand within the EU is to adopt the Ahtisaari plan, in case a U.N. Security Council resolution is passed; and this has not happened." He remarked that, even if the U.S. recognized Kosovo, [independence] would still not be "final" because, in this part of the world, it was the EU's position that mattered.

Government Must Decide how to Handle UDI and Elections

¶7. (SBU) Current Minister of Labor and Social Policy and President of the Sandzak Democratic Party (SDS), Rasim Ljajic, said publicly on September 13 that the ruling coalition government needed to decide jointly both how Serbia would react in the event of a Kosovo UDI and when to hold presidential elections. Otherwise, he said, the ruling GOS coalition could collapse. In an interview to daily Vecernje Novosti, he speculated that it would take an agreement between Tadic and Kostunica on these two issues to prevent a crisis in the GOS. Ljajic said that the fall of government would not necessarily lead to new parliamentary elections, but could instead result in a re-juggling of party control of key positions in government offices and parliament.

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Prorokovic Claims Comments were Misunderstood

¶8. (U) In response to a request from EU Enlargement Commissioner Ollie Rehn to explain his comments regarding Serbia's options in case of a UDI (reftel), Prorokovic stated on September 8 that Serbia was not threatening violence and that its position in the Troika-facilitated talks was based on the respect for international law. "I don't know on what Commissioner Olli Rehn has based his interpretations that Serbia is threatening violence," Prorokovic told TANJUG, underscoring that he would gladly clarify his stand to Rehn. "It would be thoughtless of a European commissioner to do this based on comments and free interpretations of my statements by some analysts who are at the same time analysts, formally independent, and advisers to Albanian politicians," Prorokovic said.

Russia Supports Extending Negotiations

¶9. (SBU) Russian DCM Alexey Sokolov told the DCM on September 13 that Kosovo talks should continue, if there was no agreement between the parties. Sokolov's comments echoed statements of Russian Troika member, Aleksandar Botsan-Kharchenko, reported locally on September 12, that Russia would insist on the continuation of the Kosovo status negotiations after December 10 unless the parties reached a compromise. In the same interview, Botsan-Kharchenko characterized DAS Volker's comment as a sign of America "undermining the process." DCM told Sokolov that Karchenko's public comments did not help the process. Sokolov stated that whatever the outcome of the talks, resource-poor and under-developed Kosovo ultimately would be an "EU problem." In a more encouraging note, Sokolov told DCM that Russian Ambassador Aleksandar Alekseyev was impressed by his August meeting in Belgrade with U.S. Troika Representative Frank Wisner and commended their working relationship and Wisner's knowledge of the Kosovo process.

Kosovo Serbs Urged not to Participate in Elections

¶10. (U) The Serbian Government announced on September 13, that the government, in consultation with President Tadic, advised Kosovo Serbs not to participate in the upcoming assembly elections in Kosovo. The government said that it would continue consultations with President Tadic on the issue of Kosovo Serbs participation in the local elections.

¶11. (SBU) Serb List for Kosovo Leader Oliver Ivanovic told the Ambassador in a September 14 meeting in Belgrade that, with the GOS announcement it would be difficult for any Kosovo Serbs to participate in the elections after such a clear statement from Belgrade. Expressing his disappointment, he said that the GOS had effectively marginalized anyone who dissented with Belgrade's view.

¶12. (SBU) Asked what should be the U.S. main message during this time, Ivanovic said the United States should: issue a strong message that the United States would not tolerate any form of violence; insist that Pristina not take any unilateral steps; and, should effectively explain the U.S. position to European partners.

Comment

¶13. (SBU) The Ambassador's widely-published and well-received public statement of USG commitment to ongoing Kosovo negotiations and support for the Ahtisaari plan effectively countered Kostunica's press offensive charging that the USG would support a Kosovo UDI. The Volker story seems to be dying down as a result. The DS's silence, in particular President Tadic's, in the face of Kostunica's attack, however, played as muted endorsement for Kostunica's tactics. Embassy will continue to urge DS leadership to challenge unhelpful or undemocratic DSS pronouncements, such as the most recent order for for Kosovo Serbs to boycott the assembly elections.
End Comment.

MUNTER